

Marion Davies Estate, Fence and Bulkhead
415 Pacific Coast Highway
Santa Monica
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-2617-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

**Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107**

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MARION DAVIES ESTATE, FENCE AND BULKHEAD

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- Location: 415 Pacific Coast Highway (West side of Pacific Coast Highway)
Santa Monica, Los Angeles County, California
UTM Coordinates: Zone 7, 3765950 N, 360350 E, Topanga 7.5 quad.
- Significance: The Marion Davies Estate was constructed in 1929 from the designs of renowned architect Julia Morgan. The original development, then called Ocean House, was built by William Randolph Hearst and his mistress Marion Davies. It consisted of five white Georgian Colonial buildings which were opulently furnished. While most of the original structures have been demolished over the years, the North House, Swimming Pool, Fence and Bulkhead remain from the original estate.
- Description: The 430 foot long, 9'-7" high fence is located along the southeasterly edge of the property, adjacent to Pacific Coast Highway. It was designed to be compatible with the Georgian Colonial style of the estate buildings. It consists of 1X8-3/4" painted tongue and groove boards, on both sides of 2X4 framing. The tongue and groove boards are set between wood posts spaced 11'-3" from inside post to inside post. The posts are topped by a decorative globe, cap and collar details. The entire fence has been painted white. Over the years, sections of wood board have been removed and replaced with incompatible plywood siding and a sliding chain-link gate. Some of the decorative elements are missing. There is a wood pedestrian gate, painted white, located to the south of the North House. The gate was inspired by the Georgian Colonial style of the estate. The gate is 2'-2" wide X 7'-2" high. It has two recessed panels, 10" wide by 4'-0" high, each located 6-1/2" from the outside edge of the gate. The gate is topped with a simple, double scroll design. The gate is flanked on either side by 6" wide supports. Over the years, a 6-1/2" wide metal strap was added to the gate for stability. It is located 4'-9-1/2" up from grade.
- The wood bulkhead/retaining wall supports the southwesterly right-of-way of the adjacent Pacific Coast Highway. This wall is constructed of a wood pile system with wood lagging. The structure has been boxed in with 1X wood siding similar to that used in the fence construction. This siding has been painted white. Over the years, sections of this siding have been replaced with plywood.

Historical Context: 415 Pacific Coast Highway, Santa Monica, is the address of the historic property which was the original Marion Davies Estate. It contains a complex of buildings and recreational components reflecting its last private incarnation as a beach club. The site is now run as a public recreation and meeting facility by the City of Santa Monica, which leases the property from the State of California. The site was declared a City Landmark in 1980 and designated as a Site of Historic Interest in 1987, by the Santa Monica Landmarks Commission, acting as a part of a certified local government. The property is also eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The original development, then called Ocean House, was designed by Julia Morgan and built by William Randolph Hearst and actress Marion

Davies. It consisted of five white Georgian Colonial buildings which were opulently furnished and used as a part-time residence for Hearst and Davies. The estate was a famous site for lavish entertainments of celebrities and international dignitaries.

In 1945, Davies sold the estate. It was converted into a private, but unsuccessful beach club, then a hotel, and finally put up for auction. By this time the buildings had been stripped of their extravagant fixtures and finishings. The structures had fallen into a deteriorated and unsafe condition due to the damaging dampness, salt air and lack of maintenance.

The site was deeded to the State of California in 1956. To make way for a beach parking lot, the State demolished most of the original buildings. Only the 7,000 sf "North House" guesthouse, the pool and its deck and retaining wall, and the 430 ft. retaining wall and wood fence along the Pacific Coast Highway boundary remain from the original estate. In the late 1960's the property was leased to a private beach club, the Sand and Sea Club.

Over the years a new main building, locker rooms, cabanas, banquet hall, kitchen, maintenance buildings, offices, decks and reception areas were added in a variety of architectural styles, some vaguely reminiscent of the original Ocean House. The quality and styles of some of these later additions were done with little care for visual integrity or historic accuracy. It was believed that some of the original building

materials were incorporated into later structures, although exactly where and how much has not been ascertained.

Prior to the January 17, 1994 Northridge Earthquake, plans were underway to rebuild the fence and retaining wall along Pacific Coast Highway. The fence was in a damaged state due to dryrot and the wood retaining wall was in a poor, unstable condition. The fence was leaning in areas. Buttresses were installed for added stability until the new construction could commence.

The January 17, 1994 earthquake and aftershocks damaged the 430 ft wood fence and retaining wall beyond repair. Where the fence had once leaned in areas, it now as a result of soil movement and displacement caused by the quake, ripples and bends along its entire length.

Sources: Bibliography

1. 5/3/29
City of Santa Monica Building Permit No. 2341
Issued to F.A. Hellenthal (builder)
2. 6/17/80
City of Santa Monica Landmarks Commission
Application for Historical Landmark/District
L.C. Case No. 05-022
3. 11/12/87
City of Santa Monica Landmarks Commission
Resolution of Historic Interest
Resolution No 1987-B
4. 2/49
Script, The California Magazine
Ocean House pp 13-14
5. 10/16/49
Los Angeles Examiner
Marion Davies' Beach House Becomes Hotel
By Howard C. Heyn

Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

1. Julia Morgan Archives
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
San Luis Obispo, California
Robert Kennedy Library
Department of Special Collections
2. University of California at Berkeley
College of Environmental Design Library
J. Morgan Collection (a part of the college)
CED doc.index ref. 426 Collection # 5106425124
Berkeley, California

Project Information: Project recordation is a mitigative recording required by a Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Santa Monica, the California State Historic Preservation Officer and The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Do to the extensive damage to the structures, demolition and reconstruction of the fence and bulkhead is planned for the Spring of 1995.

The proposed replacement retaining wall will be constructed of concrete masonry units per current code requirements. This concrete block retaining structure will not be visible from the highway frontage.

The existing fence material is a flat, paint grade wood, which with few exceptions has cracked, warped and separated to the point where it cannot be reused. New 1X redwood boards to match the existing will be used to replace the fencing. The trim moldings remaining at the top and base of the fence will be replaced with redwood molding pieces to match.

The proposed design of the new fence posts exactly replicate the existing posts in scale and detail. They will be constructed out of redwood (painted) for endurance. The trim and cap detail will be exactly replicated using redwood moldings. The posts will be supported by new concrete footings and an interior steel structure, which will ensure their durability.

The existing decorative wood caps and collars topping the wood fence posts will be used to make molds for the new pieces. The new elements will be made out of cast fiberglass and painted. This material is often used in the restoration of intricate details, can be finished to match a wood texture, will paint beautifully, and will withstand the harsh oceanside environment.

The old pedestrian wood gate will be carefully restored and reused in the new fence design. It will be located just south of the North House.

The diagonal wood lattice fencing under the North House porte cochere is warped and cracked, making repairs unfeasible. It will be replaced with painted redwood lattice work.

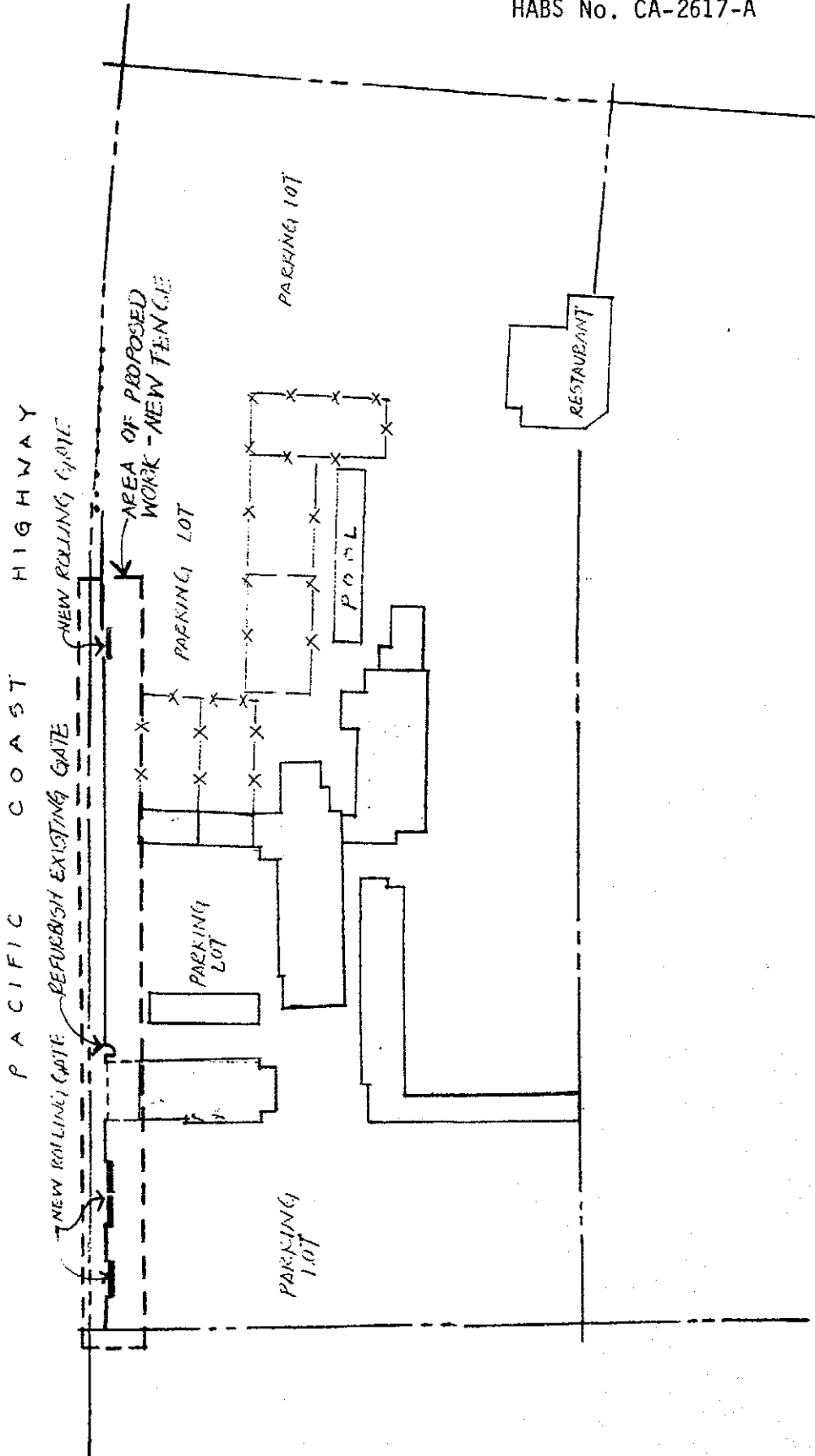
The proposed fence design does contain a modification to the original fence design. As originally built, the fence was designed to provide visual privacy for the property. Now, however, since this is a public facility, there is a need and desire to create a more open design. Therefore, the top portion of the vertical fencing, starting from 4'-4" above grade, has been replaced with the same open diagonal painted wood lattice as found under the North House porte cochere.

Project funding is part of a HUD-CDBG Block Grant.

Project documentation has been undertaken by The City of Santa Monica, Department of Environmental and Public Works Management, Engineering Division by Lauren "M" Friedman, Project Manager.

Photographic documentation of this Project has been prepared by Steve Tavo of Positive Image.

This report was prepared by Lauren "M" Friedman on the 28 February, 1995.



415 PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY
SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

SITE PLAN
NOT TO SCALE